United States

54 Gender Identity Terms Every Ally Should Know

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LAST UPDATED MAY 31, 2019, 9:30 AM

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PHOTOGRAPHED BY STEPHANIE GONOT.

We talk a lot about labels in the LGBTQ+ community. Ideally, we'd live in a world where everyone could exist as whatever gender they are without constantly having to explain or defend

themselves. In a world like that, we might not have to put a name to a gender. But that's not where we're at right now. Although there are more and more spaces that understand that there are many gender identities, we still live in a world where gender defaults to man or woman, and society at large rarely talks about genders that exist outside of that binary (and there are many).

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Because we live in this world, labels are important. Being able to explain that not all people experience their gender as a man or a woman, but might be a mix of the two (bigender), or something entirely different (genderqueer), helps dismantle the rigidity of a gender binary. Having names and definitions for these gender identities can help gender non-conforming people shape an understanding of who they are, or more easily describe themselves to others.

That's why we worked with GLAAD to compile a list of gender identity terms and their definitions — so that maybe someone can find themself in one of these words, or their friends and allies can gain a better understanding of who they are.

Keep in mind that this is not an exhaustive list, and that language around gender identity is constantly changing, so we'll be updating this story with new definitions.

You can check out the full gender identity and sexual orientation glossary we created with GLAAD here.

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Sex

The classification of a person as male or female. At birth, infants are assigned a sex, usually based on the appearance of their external anatomy. (This is what is written on the birth certificate.) A person's sex, however, is actually a combination of bodily characteristics including: chromosomes, hormones, internal and external reproductive organs, and secondary sex characteristics.

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Gender Identity

A person's internal, deeply held sense of their gender. For transgender people, their own internal gender identity does not match the sex they were assigned at birth. Most people have a gender identity of man or woman (or boy or girl). For some people, their gender identity does not fit neatly into one of those two choices (see non-binary and genderqueer). Unlike gender expression, gender identity is not visible to others.

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Misgender

When someone uses the wrong pronoun or term to refer to a person, such as calling a transgender boy “her” or a transgender girl “him.”

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Gender Expression

External manifestations of gender, expressed through a person's name, pronouns, clothing, haircut, behavior, voice, and/or body characteristics. Society identifies these cues as masculine and feminine, although what is considered masculine or feminine changes over time and varies by culture. Typically, transgender people seek to align their gender expression with their gender identity, rather than the sex they were assigned at birth.

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Transgender (adj.)

An umbrella term for people whose gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth. Many transgender people are prescribed hormones by their doctors to bring their bodies into alignment with their gender identity. Some undergo surgery as well. But not all transgender people can or will take those steps, and a transgender identity is not dependent upon physical appearance or medical procedures. Use the descriptive term preferred by the person.

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Transsexual (adj.)

An older term that originated in the medical and psychological communities. Still preferred by some people who have permanently changed — or seek to change — their bodies through medical interventions, including but not limited to hormones and/or surgeries. Unlike transgender, transsexual is not an umbrella term. Many transgender people do not identify as transsexual and prefer the word transgender. It is best to ask which term a person uses.

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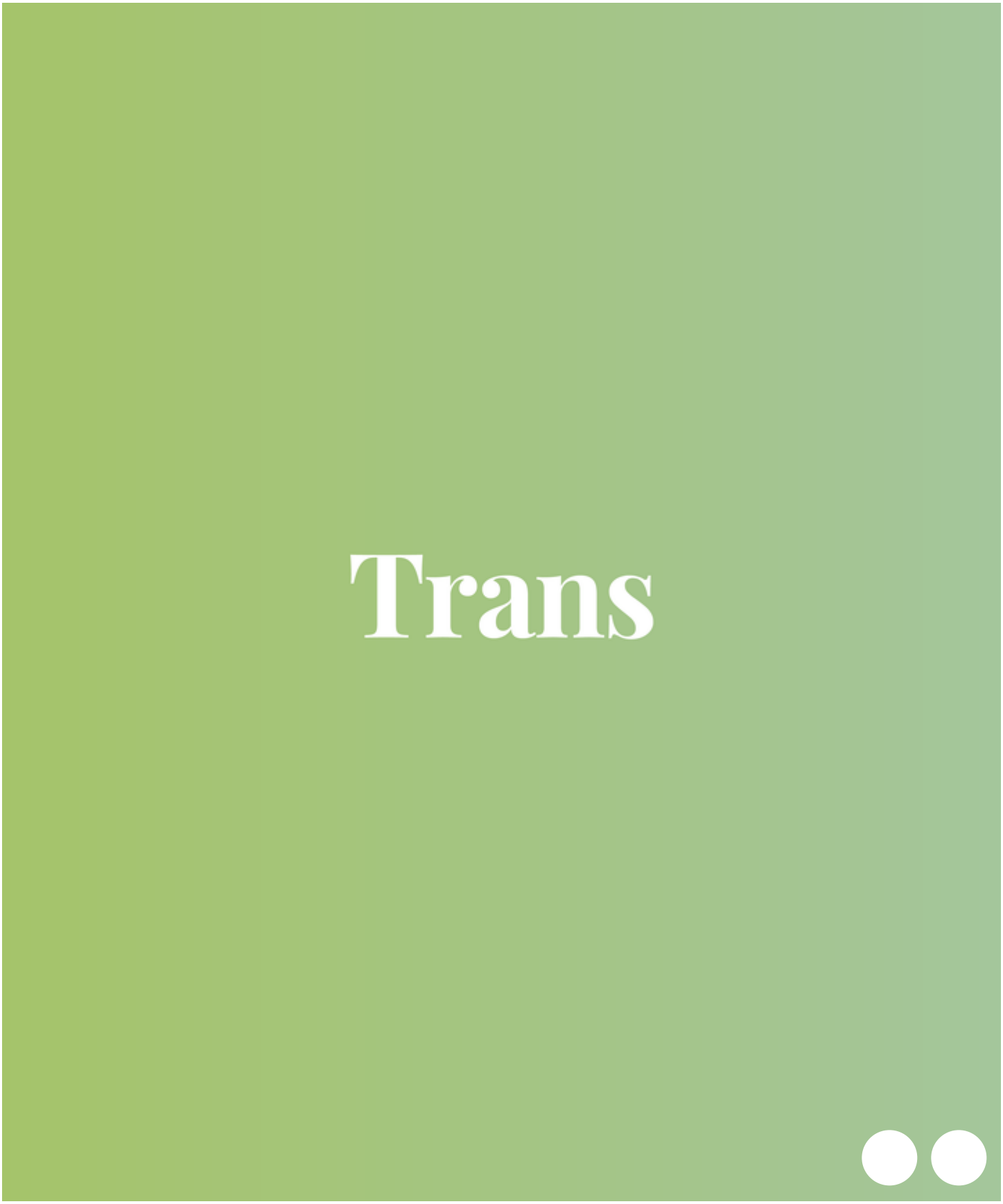

Trans

Used as shorthand to mean transgender or transsexual — or sometimes to be inclusive of a wide variety of identities under the transgender umbrella.

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Cross-dresser

While anyone may wear clothes associated with a different sex, the term *cross-dresser* is typically used to refer to men who occasionally wear clothes, makeup, and accessories culturally associated with women. Those men typically identify as heterosexual. This activity is a form of gender expression and not done for entertainment purposes. Cross-dressers do not wish to permanently change their sex or live full-time as women. *Replaces the term "transvestite."*

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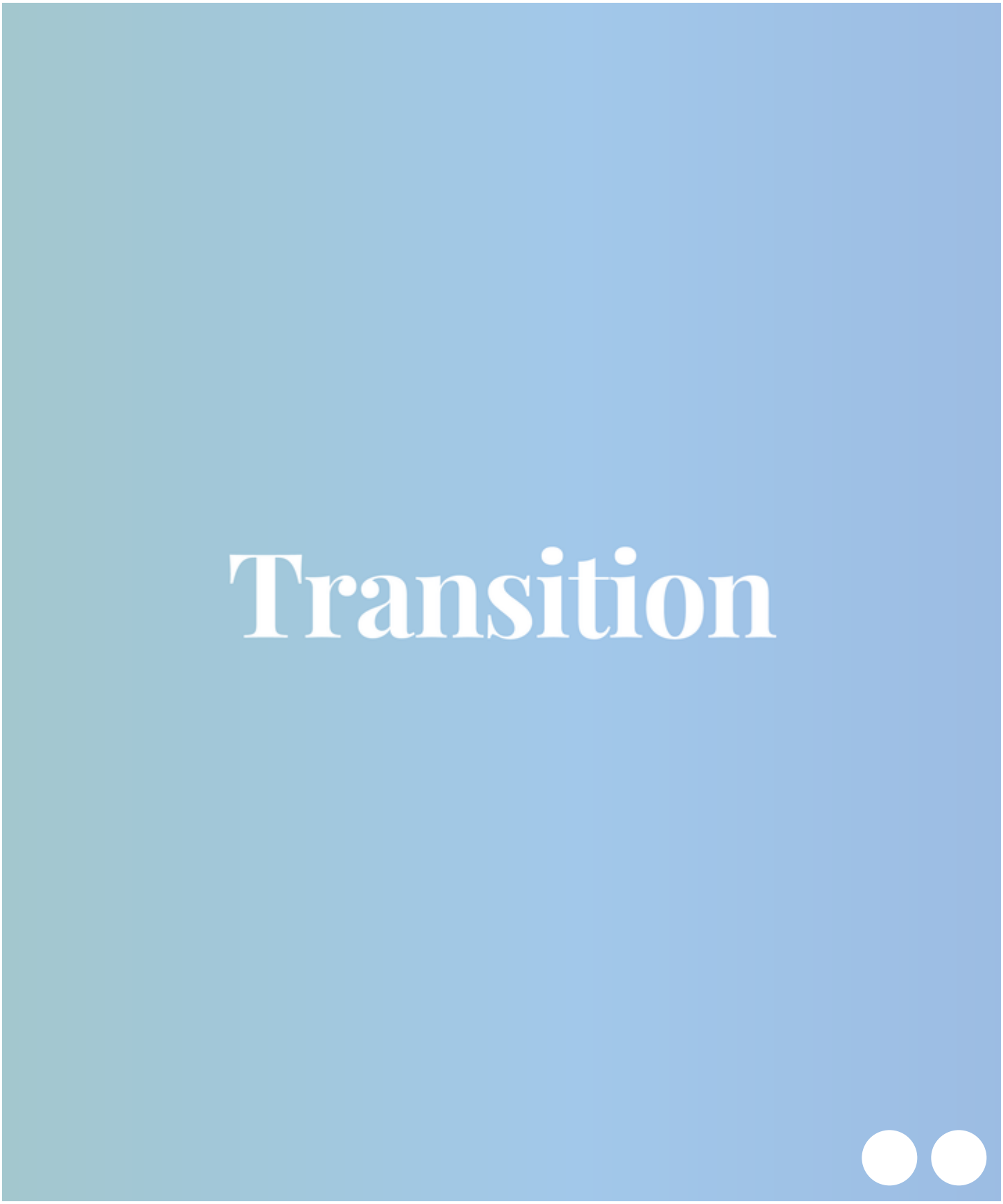

Transition

Altering one's birth sex is not a one-step procedure; it is a complex process that occurs over a long period of time. Transition can include some or all of the following personal, medical, and legal steps: telling one's family, friends, and co-workers; using a different name and new pronouns; dressing differently; changing one's name and/or sex on legal documents; hormone therapy; and possibly (though not always) one or more types of surgery. The exact steps involved in transition vary from person to person. *Avoid the phrase "sex change."*

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Sex Reassignment Surgery (SRS)

Also called Gender Confirmation Surgery (GCS). Refers to doctor-supervised surgical interventions, and is only one small part of transition (see transition above). Avoid the phrase "sex change operation." Do not refer to someone as being "pre-op" or "post-op." Not all transgender people choose to, or can afford to, undergo medical surgeries.

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Gender Dysphoria

In 2013, the American Psychiatric Association released the fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-V), which replaced the outdated entry "Gender Identity Disorder" with *Gender Dysphoria*, and changed the criteria for diagnosis. The necessity of a psychiatric diagnosis remains controversial, as both psychiatric and medical authorities recommend individualized medical treatment through hormones and/or surgeries to treat gender dysphoria. Some transgender advocates believe the inclusion of Gender Dysphoria in the DSM is necessary in order to advocate for health insurance that covers the medically necessary treatment recommended for transgender people.

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Cisgender

A term used by some to describe people who are not transgender. "Cis-" is a Latin prefix meaning "on the same side as," and is therefore an antonym of "trans-."

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Gender Non-Conforming

A term used to describe some people whose gender expression is different from conventional expectations of masculinity and femininity. *Please note that not all gender non-conforming people identify as transgender; nor are all transgender people gender non-conforming*. Many people have gender expressions that are not entirely conventional – that fact alone does not make them transgender. Many transgender men and women have gender expressions that are conventionally masculine or feminine. Simply being transgender does not make someone gender non-conforming. The term is not a synonym for *transgender* or *transsexual* and should only be used if someone self-identifies as gender non-conforming.

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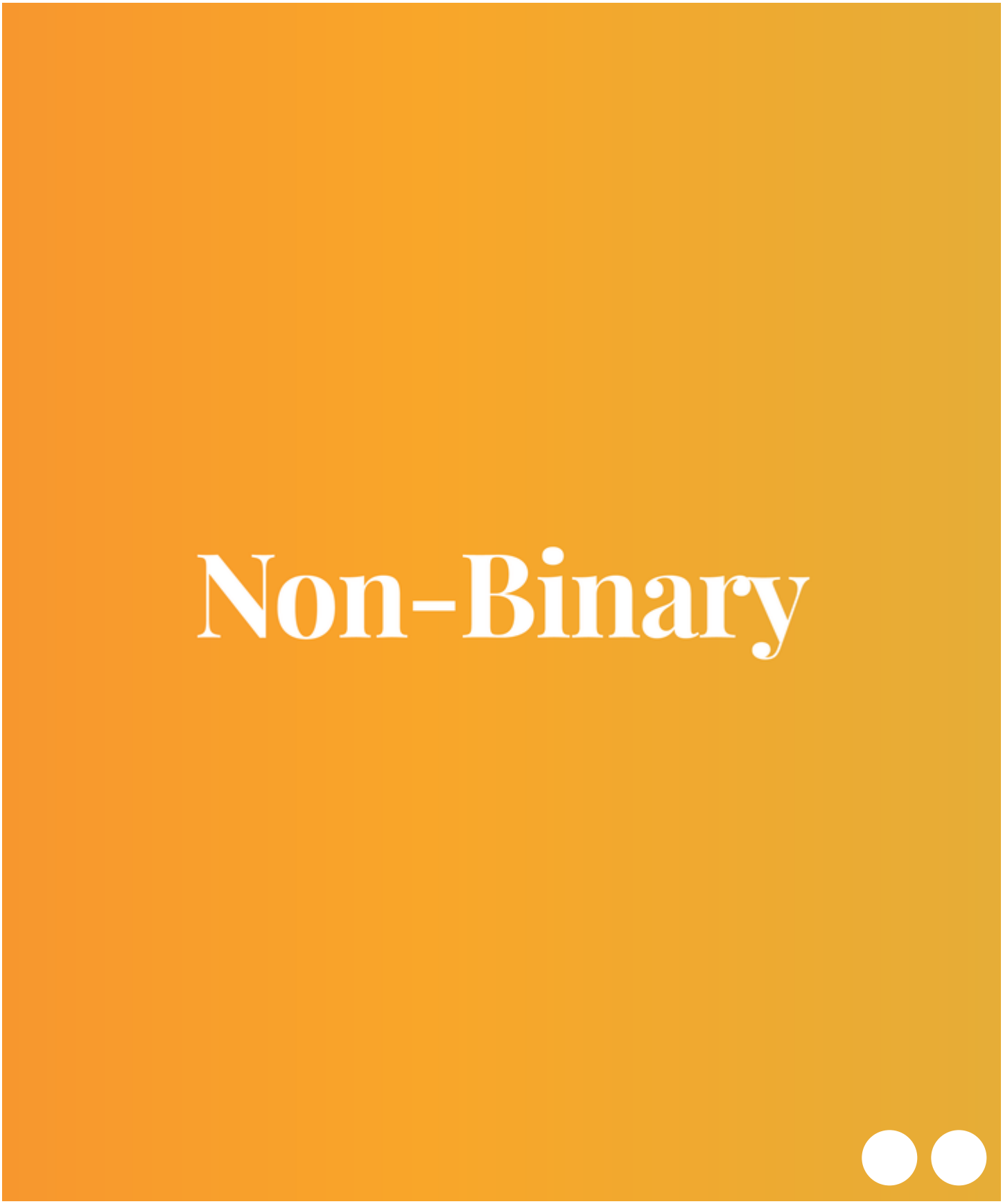

Non-Binary

A used by some people who experience their gender identity and/or gender expression as falling outside the categories of man and woman. They may define their gender as falling somewhere in between man and woman, or they may define it as wholly different from these terms. The term is not a synonym for *transgender* or *transsexual* and should only be used if someone self-identifies as non-binary. Non-binary is sometimes shortened to enby or NB.

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Genderqueer

A term used by some people who experience their gender identity and/or gender expression as falling outside the categories of "man" and "woman." They may define their gender as falling somewhere in between man and woman, include both man and woman, or they may define it as wholly different from these terms. The term is not a synonym for *transgender* or *transsexual* and should only be used if someone self-identifies as genderqueer.

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They/their (pronouns)

The singular *they* can be used to describe someone who identifies as neither male nor female. It is increasingly common for people who have a non-binary gender identity to use they/them as their pronoun, though not all non-binary people choose to do so. For example: "Jacob writes eloquently about their non-binary identity. They have also appeared frequently in the media to talk about their family's reaction to their gender expression." It can also be used when you don't want to assign a gender to someone. For example: "Every individual should be able to express their gender in a way that is comfortable for them."

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Intersex

An umbrella term describing people born with reproductive or sexual anatomy and/or a chromosome pattern that can't be classified as typically male or female. Those variations are also sometimes referred to as Differences of Sex Development (DSD.) Avoid the outdated and derogatory term "hermaphrodite." While some people can be intersex and also identify as transgender, the two are separate and should not be conflated.

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Agender

A person who does not identify with any gender, or intentionally doesn't follow expectations of gender.

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Androgyne

A person who doesn't identify with or present as either a man or a woman, and generally has both masculine and feminine qualities.

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Bigender

Someone who identifies with two distinct genders, such as man/woman or woman/androgyne. Bigender people don't necessarily identify with each gender 50% of the time, and unlike gender-fluid people, they don't exist on a spectrum, either.

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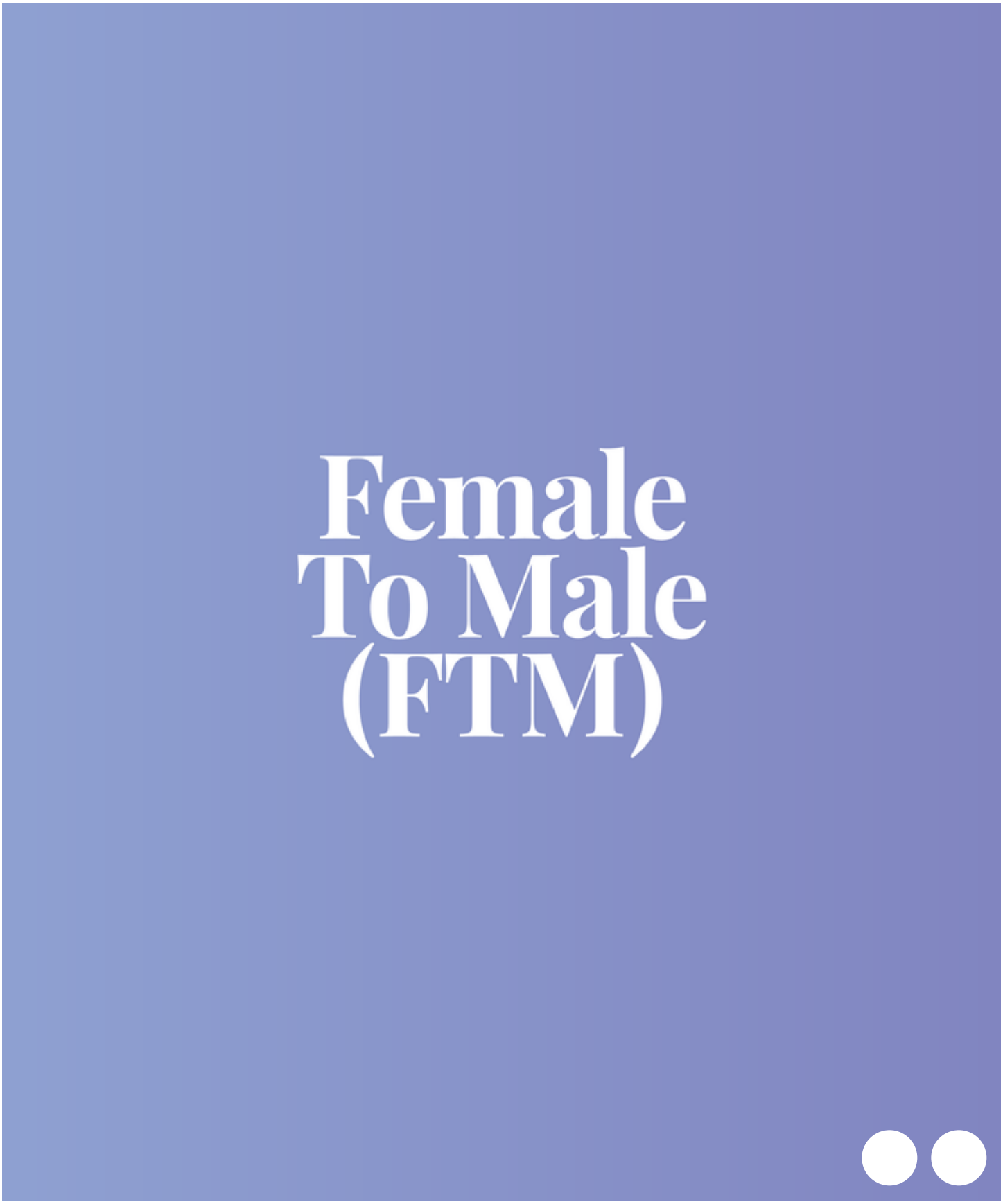

Female To Male (FTM)

A term used to talk about transgender men who were assigned female at birth. Many transgender men prefer the word to use the phrase Assigned Female At Birth (AFAB), or simply transgender man or trans man. It is best to ask which term a person uses.

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Gender-Fluid

Someone for whom gender identity and presentation is a spectrum. A gender-fluid person

doesn’t confine themself to one gender, or even a few. Instead, they may fluctuate between presenting as feminine, masculine, neither, or both.

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Gender Questioning

A person who is questioning their current gender identity and/or exploring other identities and presentations.

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Gender Variant

Like gender nonconforming, gender variant is an umbrella term used for anyone who is not cisgender. The term is sometimes considered problematic considering it implies that non-binary genders are deviations from the two “natural” genders.

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Male To Female (MTF)

A term used to talk about transgender women, who were assigned male at birth. Many transgender women do not identify as MTF and prefer the phrase Assigned Male At Birth (AMAB), or simply transgender woman or trans woman. It is best to ask which term a person uses.

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Neutrois

An umbrella term used for people who do not identify as either a man or a woman. Agender, gender-fluid, non-binary, and genderless people may all also identify as neutrois.

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Pangender

A non-binary gender identity, referring to people who experience all gender identities either simultaneously or over time.

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Transmasculine

Someone who was assigned female at birth, but identifies and presents as masculine. This person may or may not identify totally as a man or a transgender man.

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Transfeminine

Someone who was assigned male at birth, but identifies and presents as feminine. This person may or may not identify totally as a woman or a transgender woman.

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Sex assigned at birth (SAAB)

Refers to the sex (male or female) a doctor designated a person as after examining their genitals, for example assigned male at birth (AMAB) or assigned female at birth (AFAB).

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Butch

Someone who identifies and presents as masculine. While it's most often used to talk about

masculine lesbians, butch can also describe masculine queer men or queer people of other genders.

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Feminine-of-center

Used to describe people who feel, and often present, as feminine but may not identify as a woman. Feminine-of-center people may also identify as femme or transfeminine.

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Masculine-of-center

Used to describe people who feel, and often present, as masculine but may not identify as a man. Masculine-of-center people may also often identify as butch, stud, boi, or transmasculine.

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Feminine-presenting

Describes someone who expresses gender in a feminine way. Someone who is feminine-presenting might or might not also be feminine-of-center.

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Masculine-presenting

Describes someone who expresses gender in a masculine way. Someone who is masculine-presenting might or might not also be masculine-of-center.

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Femme

Someone who identifies and often presents as feminine, particularly queer women.

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Gender normative

A synonym for cisgender, gender normative people are those whose gender identity matches up with expectations of their sex assigned at birth. Also called *gender straight*.

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Mx.

Used instead of Mr., Mrs., or Ms. for someone who does not identify as either a man or a woman. Example: Mx. Smith.

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Third gender

A term used in some cultures to describe someone who doesn't identify as a man or a woman. Third sex is sometimes also used to talk about intersex people. Third gender can also mean many different things to people who use the term as a way to break the gender binary.

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Top surgery

A gender-affirming surgery for transgender people to either remove breasts (for transgender men) or add breast implants (for transgender women).

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Ze/hir/hirs

Gender-inclusive pronouns that some transgender, gender fluid, and non-binary people choose to use instead of they/them/theirs or binary gendered pronouns like she/her/hers and he/him/his.

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Aliagender

Someone who defines their gender as “other” than a man or a woman. It was coined as a way to talk about a third gender without appropriating the term Third Gender from other cultures.

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Boi

Often used by butch lesbians and trans people of color to describe someone who presents and identifies as masculine, but not necessarily as a man.

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Demiboy

Similar to bigender, someone who identifies as a demiboy experiences their gender as partly boy and partly another gender.

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Demigirl

Similar to bigender, someone who identifies as a demigirl experiences their gender as partly girl and partly another gender.

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Genderfuck

Someone who purposefully dismantles people's concepts and understanding of gender.

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Intergender

Someone who experiences their gender as in between other genders, such as someone whose gender falls somewhere between being a man or a woman.

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Polygender

Someone who has more than one gender and either experiences all of their genders at once or is moving between genders at any given time.

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Trigender

Someone who experiences three distinct genders, either all at once or is moving between them.

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Stone Butch

Often used to describe a lesbian who presents and identifies firmly as masculine. Stone butch people might also identify as transgender or non-binary, but don't always. They may also dislike having their genitals touched during sex, but don't always.

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High Femme

Often used to describe a lesbian, bisexual, or queer woman who presents and identifies firmly as feminine. While many people believe that high femme women are only interested in butch women, that is not true.

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Soft Butch

Used to describe a queer woman who presents masculine, but also slightly feminine. A soft butch may dress in masculine clothing, but have long hair or wear makeup. “Futch” is sometimes also used, although less commonly.

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Dead Name

The name given to a transgender person at birth, which they often change when they transition. It should not be used to refer to them. Use the person's chosen name instead.

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Gender Creative

People, usually children, who don't conform to gender stereotypes but also don't necessarily identify as transgender. They are sometimes also called gender non-conforming.

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GENDER IDENTITY TERMS AND EXAMPLES, LGBTQ DEFINITIONS

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED ON JANUARY 16, 2018, 1:20 PM

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PRASHANT ARYA

31 August, 2020

Great list of terms related to the LGBT community. Its very important for the society to identify and understand what really the LGBT community is. If you have any confusion or you just want to go further, below is a link to a article which can help you know more about the LGBT community.
https://golovehero.com/do-you-know-these-top-25-words-as-an-lgbtq-ally/

Do you know these top 25 words as an LGBTQ ally? - Love Hero

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1 reply

FIERCEWATERMELON

4 February, 2019

I really don't agree. I think society needs to change, and a huge list of labels does nothing to help that. It adds to confusion and frustration and makes people less likely to want to understand what someone's personal journey is.

Reply 34 9

SLICKLEAF

6 June, 2019

As a cisgender person I found this list incredibly helpful. Correctly identifing or being correctly identified is really such a small thing people can do for the LGBT community.

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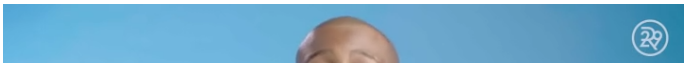

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